

Remarks on the Attack on the U.S.S. *Cole* and the Situation in the Middle East

October 12, 2000

The President. I have just been meeting with my national security team on today's tragic events in the Middle East, and I would like to make a brief statement.

First, as you know, an explosion claimed the lives of at least four sailors on one of our naval vessels, the U.S.S. *Cole*, this morning. Many were injured; a number are still missing. They were simply doing their duty. The ship was refueling in a port in Yemen while en route to the Persian Gulf. We're rushing medical assistance to the scene, and our prayers are with the families who have lost their loved ones or are still awaiting news.

If, as it now appears, this was an act of terrorism, it was a despicable and cowardly act. We will find out who was responsible and hold them accountable. If their intention was to deter us from our mission of promoting peace and security in the Middle East, they will fail utterly.

I have directed the Department of Defense, the FBI, and the State Department to send officials to Yemen to begin the investigation. Secretary Albright has spoken with President Salih of Yemen, and we expect to work closely with his government to that effect.

Our military forces and our Embassies in the region have been on heightened state of alert for some time now. I have ordered our ships in the region to pull out of port and our land forces to increase their security.

Tensions are extremely high today throughout the entire region, as all of you know. I strongly condemn the murder of Israeli soldiers in Ram Allah today. While I understand the anguish Palestinians feel over the losses they have suffered,

there can be no possible justification for mob violence. I call on both sides to undertake a cease-fire immediately and immediately to condemn all acts of violence.

Finally, let me say this. The Israeli-Palestinian conflict is one of the greatest tragedies and most difficult problems of our time. But it can be solved. The progress of the last few years—progress that brought Israel to the hope of a final peace with true security and Palestinians to the hope of a sovereign state recognized by the entire world—was not made through violence. It happened because both sides sat down together, negotiated, and slowly built up the trust that violence destroys.

Now is the time to stop the bloodshed, to restore calm, to return to dialog and ultimately to the negotiating table. The alternative to the peace process is now no longer merely hypothetical. It is unfolding today before our very eyes.

Now I need to go back to work on this, and so I won't take questions right now. But the Department of Defense will offer a briefing today and will be able to answer the questions that are relevant to today's events.

Thank you.

NOTE: The President spoke at 1:47 p.m. in the Rose Garden at the White House, following a meeting with the national security team. In his remarks, he referred to President Ali Salih of Yemen. The proclamations of October 12 and October 16 on the death of American servicemembers aboard the U.S.S. *Cole* is listed in Appendix D at the end of this volume.